

*Rev. C. Porter Dyer With the Respects of  
Abel Cushing*

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5646 A GOOD OLD AGE.

A

## SERMON

PREACHED AT THE

CHURCH AT HARRISON SQUARE,

DORCHESTER,

ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1862,

ON OCCASION OF THE DECEASE OF

MRS. SARAH CUSHING,

WIFE OF HON. ABEL CUSHING.

BY S. G. BULFINCH.

SAMUEL P. BROWN, PRINTER:

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The lady, whose decease occasioned the following sermon, was the daughter of Moses and Martha (Lincoln) Whiton, and was born in Hingham, January 11th, 1783. In 1811 she became the wife of Hon. Abel Cushing, who, with their four sons, survives her. She died at her home in Dorchester, January 27th, 1862. This tribute to her worth is printed, by request of her family, for private distribution.

## S E R M O N .

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Genesis xv. 15.—THOU SHALT BE BURIED IN A GOOD OLD AGE.

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These words occur among the promises which Almighty love and wisdom made to Abraham. That love and wisdom gave in this, the highest good that could be realized during the earthly life of him who was thus honored ; for they assured him of reaching length of days, and in the adjective “good,” they implied that his life should be not only long but happy.

The blessing thus promised to Abraham, who does not desire ? Not that we would hasten the flight of time, and wish to see age approach to take the place of middle life ; but that we would fain, when that is past,

linger yet on earth. However we may have subdued fear by the strength of manliness or of religion, however we may have reasoned or prayed away that shrinking from death which false views have rendered excessive,—however we may have prepared ourselves for the last hour, by faith and penitence and good works, yet we all wish to live. If the portion of life which remains seems less attractive than the past did, it is yet a portion of life. The cup of earthly existence is so sweet, that we would drain it, though it were to the dregs.

But a *good old age* is not the dregs of life. There is more in such a period than we do justice to, in the supposition we have made, of its being desired only because it is the alternative of death. Though the young may think that age is dreary, though the active may imagine that a season in which activity is over can afford no enjoyment, yet we know by the examples we have seen, nay, by our own consciousness of the capacities within, that old age may have its sources of happiness, which if different from those of youthful or of middle life, are not inferior to them. If the peculiar blessings of preceding years have then departed, they are no longer needed. The wild mirth of childhood, the reckless ardor of youth, the incessant activity of busy manhood, were each well in its place, but they have had their time, and we would not call them back. But age has its own blessings;—its calm wisdom, its delight in observing and assisting the course of those who are younger, its readiness to impart the lessons of experience, its pleasant memories of the past, its halloved meditations on the approaching future. True, age suffers the loss of strength, but it can avail itself of

the strength of those who are younger. Its feebleness is a sacred claim, which even strangers are ready to own, and which commands the willing aid of all who are connected by the ties of nature. Honor is an excitement to the boy, to the man often a disappointment; but around the aged head it is a well-won crown. Love watches over the infant, and cheers and strengthens the middle course of life; with the aged it still ministers with its sweet offerings, some of them from sources before unknown, others the repeated tribute of long tried affection. And religion, which has been to youth a guide, to maturity a defence, that to the old age of the Christian is the very foretaste of heaven. Divested of all former sternness, no longer speaking words of warning against temptations that have now passed away, religion, in the closing period of a long and well-spent life, unseals the aged eye to discern how goodness and mercy have ever followed, how God's providence has attended, and how his love waits to crown the believer with his blessings.

But let us observe in more methodical order what are the characteristics of "a good old age."

The first of them is *rest*; and this blessing, how dear it is! Busy, and fond of our occupations as we are, who does not enjoy the rest that at intervals is now permitted him? Who does not at times look forward with earnest hope to its more continued possession? Even they desire it, who, if it were at their disposal, would probably feel more strongly than they suppose, the impulse to abandon it for active pursuits. Rest indeed, except at intervals to gather strength, is not natural to the human being in the years when labor is his duty; but when those years of labor have passed, and have

been well employed, then rest comes at its right season. The craving for action is no longer felt, and the loss of the power for action is therefore not deeply realized as a deprivation. Rest in its appropriate time, rest with no reproof of conscience for its enjoyment, rest well earned by former exertion,—this is the first privilege of a good old age.

And next to rest of body is rest of mind ; freedom, comparative if not entire, from those *cares* which had been the trial, (if Divine Goodness had also made them the occupation, and thus in part the pleasure) of the years gone by. Such freedom from care is in part the direct result of advanced life, which naturally devolves on others the task of providing, whether for the good of the community or of the household. In part it is that the concerns of this world appear of less interest as years increase, and as the time draws nigh when they are to be left behind. Anxiety for increase of worldly goods cannot find place in any intelligent mind, when Providence, blessing former faithfulness, has given enough ; when the wants are moderate from long habit, and even those wants must soon cease. Nay, even ambition must relax its eagerness for life's prizes, when the time is scanty to attain them, and utterly inadequate to enjoy them. And so we rest, from care as well as from labor ;—happy if our rest is grounded too on the higher principle, of committing all we are and all we care for, to the guardianship of our Heavenly Friend.

The next privilege of old age is *retrospection*. While youth is ever looking forward, the man of advanced years turns his glance back over the past. What meets his view in the scenes through which he has travelled,

is indeed of mingled good and ill. He sees where he has suffered, where he has erred ; he thinks again of wrongs that have been done to him, and still more sadly of wrongs that he has done. But with these remembrances there are others that cheer. He recalls how at one time some worthy lesson was received and welcomed into the soul. He remembers how the temptation came, to neglect that lesson ; and how it was resisted, and through God's grace he was able to go forward in the right. If he recalls the season of affliction, he recognizes now, if he did not at the time, how that affliction was made a means of blessing. The mind has become a picture gallery, filled with the representations of past scenes. He pauses before each, and recalls every incident of the transaction, and the part borne therein by every actor, while he sees something there that he saw not before.

I have seen a picture in which an angel is represented among a group who evidently discern not his presence. So it is with the portraitures of the past which memory yields to the eye of the aged Christian. He now sees the angel there, whom he saw not when himself an actor in the scene. He discerns that the Providence of God was ever near him, and owns that goodness and mercy have followed him all the days of his life.

That goodness follows him still, and among its means of blessing him is the *reverent affection* of those around. Age is the season when they who have long communicated to others, find themselves without constraint, or blame, or reluctance, receivers in their turn. Not, indeed necessarily of outward gifts ; these may be or may not be imparted, for they may be or may not be needed.

But there are greater things than these ; the respect that shows itself in a thousand acts such as no code of etiquette ever prescribed, but which take their rise from the genuine feeling within ; the desire to hear the lessons of their experience ;—the care that watches over their comfort ;—the sympathy that soothes their sufferings ;—the patient, eager love which performs for them every office that their increasing infirmity may require. There are those who carry to an excess our Saviour's holy words, “ It is more blessed to give than to receive,” and who cannot bring themselves without pain to accept the slightest favor from another. But even they will make an exception to their loved independence for that gentle ministration that waits on old age ; and if in their days of strength they have been useful to others, will bless God for the heartfelt enjoyment in their days of weakness, of that return of kindness which others make to them.

Soothed by such loving care, the spirit of the aged Christian is able to ascend above the world and hold near and sacred *intercourse with things heavenly* and unseen. The faith of childhood is undoubting through ignorance ; the child knows not that any have doubted, —knows not that there is any ground to doubt. The faith of age acquires again its share in that former certainty, from a different cause, the fulness of its experience. The prayer perhaps has been, through middle life, “ Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief ; ” —but now God has helped that unbelief, by giving instance on instance, through the years that are past, to prove the truth of all the Saviour's lessons, the worth of all that piety holds most dear. Shall he who has known God's goodness for three-fourths of a century,

doubt it now? Shall not he whose intercourse with God in prayer, for so long a time, has been constant, feel confidence in coming to His throne, and possess a nearness of intercourse, and assurance of faith, kindred to that which exists between himself and some long-tried human friend? We may rank then among the especial blessings of the aged Christian, that of a closer intercourse with God.

And from this will result the further delight of *bright anticipations for the future*. As the past recedes, that future opens. Like many another object which is alarming when indistinctly seen, but loses much of its terror on a nearer view, death, which once, when the thoughts turned to it, excited so much dread, is anticipated at last, as the sure and natural, yet gracious means of release from increasing pain, and of introduction to a happier world. It no longer bounds the view. Like the iron grating that closes the vista of some long avenue, our gaze is fixed on that till we come near it; and then we think not of it, but between its bars we look among the verdant alleys and flowery banks of the paradise beyond. The old have many ties to connect them with the unseen world. Those whom they have loved are there, in greater numbers than around them here. All their experience of Divine goodness in the past assures them of the same hereafter; and even the intermingling of sorrow with the cup of human joy confirms their faith in that more blessed world where the drops of sorrow shall no longer flow, but joy be quaffed without one taste of bitterness, the cup of immortality, the pure and holy wine of Heaven.

Such is a good old age;—crowned with the blessings of rest, in body and in mind;—happy in the retrospec-

tion of a long life well-spent, and marked through its course with many instances of God's goodness, now plainly perceived and gratefully recognised;—happy, too, in the reverent affection of those around;—enjoying a near intercourse with that God who has so long been manifested,—and enabled by faith to look forward to the more exalted happiness of the spiritual world. In the contemplation of a period of life so calm, so honored, so loving and so trustful, who shall say that youth in its brightness, or middle age in its strength, possesses the advantage over it? God “hath made everything beautiful in his time.” As each season of the year has its peculiar adornment, so is each season of life, if that life be spent in conformity to His law, bright with a radiance all its own.

But the fruit cannot be gathered unless the tree be cultivated from which it should naturally be produced; and to gain the blessing of a calm and happy old age, those qualities must be cultivated, whose results have been pointed out. To enjoy fully the rest which age requires, self-control and industry must have secured comparative freedom from pain and want; to enjoy honor and affection, the life must have been marked by deeds of usefulness and words of love; and that God may be recognized as a Friend when the last hour draws near, and faith rise with fearless aspiration towards His holy heaven, His law must in preceding years have been recognized as the soul's guide, and intercourse with Him maintained by habitual prayer and meditation. If then we hope to live to reach that period, and if we would that to us it should be thus blest, the preparation must be made by piety and virtue now. There are few who do not sometimes realize the impor-

tance of providing worldly support for that closing stage of life ; but how many neglect to form those characters, and cultivate those hopes which will secure, with God's blessing, its true happiness !

An example of the faithfulness we would urge, in early and in middle life, and a lovely illustration of its result in age, are given us in her around whose remains we have recently gathered in sorrow,—sorrow, not for any loss to her, but to ourselves in her removal. I will not dwell now on the circumstances of her death, nor on death itself. I would bring to your memory that face, so venerable and so gentle, not as we saw it last,—though then the sight was soothing and elevating,—but as we used to see its features illumined by the kind, the intelligent, and the devout spirit that was there so suitably enshrined.

Tracing the qualities just enumerated, to perceive how they were displayed in her through her previous life, and how they won for her the blessings of a good old age, we recall first that ever active industry, which made her a most efficient and laborious member of society. Yet the word “laborious” does not fitly describe her, for work seemed to her not labor but pleasure. In distant years, she gave herself bravely to toils which few in her station of life willingly encounter ; and when there was no longer need of these, her hands were still busily engaged, working for others if not for herself. That energetic usefulness was displayed in the relations of the neighbor and the friend, as well as in those of domestic life. Her hands were busy even to the last, and while providing for herself, with calm unshrinking forethought, the apparel of the grave, she could yet

take pleasure in preparing tokens of love for friends from whom she was soon to be parted.

Nor was that energy confined to the work of the hands. The active mind devised, and the animating impulse of strong will and friendly counsel carried into execution, plans for the common good. This was more observable some years since than recently ; for, with wisdom controlling the habit of exertion, she had of late left to younger management those interests which before she had superintended. But those who knew this society in its earlier years can bear witness how large was her share in those toils which contributed to its first success, and prevented it from utterly failing when trial and division came upon it. When the interest of others grew cold, hers wavered not. Ready to sustain every preacher as he came, and esteeming each one highly in love for his work's sake, yet when each one departed, she felt that her duty remained the same ; and for this church of her neighborhood, this church of her love, she still worked on, and led in the work of others. To the Sunday School her services were thus rendered ; and after she had withdrawn from its immediate care, her interest in its prosperity still continued. That interest was evinced, only a few weeks before her death, by a donation for the increase of the library, her parting gift to that cause she loved so well.

Her care for that part of our religious means was in harmony with that feeling so often exhibited in a good old age, of interest in the young. It is beautiful to see the periods of life that are most distant thus brought together. Retaining the strength of her own mind, she yet loved the company of young people. When, a few years since, Providence called her for a time to the

charge of a motherless grand-child,\* that charge which we feared was too much for one of her advanced years, became through the loving faithfulness of its performance, the source to her of the most exquisite pleasure ; —and yet her good sense and self-control were as signal-ly exhibited in resigning that cherished pleasure when such appeared the course of duty.

Nor was that loving spirit, which balanced so well the energy of her character, manifested only towards childhood. That spirit appeared most beautifully in her own home;—but I must not dwell on scenes sacred to the privacy of grief. But her kindness ceased not there. She was the friend of her neighborhood. In her stronger days many were the times when she ministered to others in those gentle cares that alleviate the pain of sickness and brighten the chamber of death ; and only recently she has been found in the same employment, assisting with ready kindness in the house of poverty and affliction. Her Christian sympathy went forth to those that were near, and to those that were far off. She felt keenly the pain of any difference of opinion ;

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\* This grandchild, Sarah, is the only daughter of Mrs. C.'s third son Horace. Her mother was Harriet, daughter of Thomas Fletcher, Esq., of Providence. She was a gentle and excellent lady and a devoted wife—fully endowed with the womanly graces as depicted in these pages. At the death of the young mother the little orphan came to the bosom of her father's mother, and how she discharged her duty has been already told. Nor was her little charge at all deficient in performance, where love and trust were duties,—inso-much that up to the present hour, the child's unwavering love for her aged grandmother has excited the special notice and admiration of their very numerous acquaintance. This is the record of one who knows, and his record is true. Rest! aged and faithful servant of duty. Rise! young, and bereaved one, and by gentleness and purity of life vindicate the character and teachings of your faithful exemplar.

but she rose above it, and would still love on. And with all her ability to be the guide of others, and the claims which her age and character gave her to respect, there appeared in her sometimes a touching humility, the sure mark of her discipleship to the meek Redeemer.

Yes, the forming influence to the character of our friend was the religion of Christ. That she had long since chosen as her guide, and had sealed that choice in the good old way, which most seem now too timid or too indifferent to take, by complying with the last request the Saviour made of his disciples,—“Do this in remembrance of me.” When, soon after my settlement here, we took measures for the observance of that sacred and touching rite, she was among the earliest members of the newly-gathered church, transferring hither the faithful testimony she had borne elsewhere. That church now mourns her loss from among its still scanty numbers, and looks around with the inquiry where are those to be found who are willing not only to sustain the institutions of religion, but to pledge themselves heart and soul to one another and to Christ, and like her to fulfil consistently that pledge? For the religion she professed was felt in her heart, and regulated her life. None that knew her could doubt that she was a religious woman. And as the thoughts and the prayers of piety had sustained her in life,—as she had owned God for her friend through year succeeding year, so was she enabled to look forward to the last event with resignation; and to make for it while in comparative health, every preparation with as calm and thorough thoughtfulness as if it were a journey.

Blessed be God, that gave to that life of faithful, humble service, a close so peaceful! Last Sabbath

morning, had the day been favorable, we should not have been surprised to see her among us ;—such a degree of health had been granted to her, notwithstanding some premonitions which she well understood and meekly received. But at that hour the summons had come. A few moments of pain there were, and then all pain was over. She sunk into insensibility,—and thence, on the second day, passed to that sleep, which has we trust been broken by the glad welcome of the angels.

Such an example, friends, should not be lost on us. If we desire to spend, like her, a calm and happy age, let us feel that only by the performance of duty, in her faithful and affectionate spirit, can the treasure be won. If we would have the hope of immortality to cheer us, life must be well spent. Especially should that example be cherished by those of her own sex. The cause of Christ needs the services of women,—the labor of their zeal, the constant adornment of their holy lives.

Friends, who feel this loss most deeply,—be consoled by the thought that it is no loss to her you have loved, but to yourselves who yet remain. And even to you, that deprivation may be remedied by faith, which brings the departed near, and by resolution to be worthy to have had such a companion, such a mother, such a friend. Every loved one whom God calls from us to heaven is a pledge sent thither that we will strive to follow. Every death we witness is a call, not of His anger but of His love, that we may be ready when our own time shall come. May God impress these solemn thoughts on all our hearts ; and fit us by His grace for a good old age on earth, and when that is past, for an eternity of bliss.





